
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	1212 9th Street NW	(X) Agenda
Landmark/District:	Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District	() Consent Calendar
	Shaw Historic District	
ANC:	2F	
Meeting Date:	November 1, 2012	(X) Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	#12-504	() Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	(X) New Construction
		() Demolition
		() Subdivision

The applicant, PGN Architects, Pllc for owners Altus Realty Partners, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a four-story apartment building with penthouses and ground floor retail on a vacant site in the Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District (and the overlapping Shaw Historic District). The new building is being proposed in conjunction with another new building at 917 M Street NW (HPA #12-503) by the same development team.

Property Description and Context

This part of 9th Street NW is representative of more than 150 years of development along a major commercial corridor. Victorian rowhouses dating from 1870 to 1890 (many converted to commercial uses beginning in the 1920s) survive interspersed with smaller one and two story 20th century commercial structures and an early automotive showroom. Taken together, the block is a diverse collection of heights and materials with a strong emphasis on Italianate proportions and ornament. The site is adjacent to an east-west alley that provides access to Blagden Alley from 9th Street. At the rear, Blagden Alley is lined with one and two story brick garages with rowlock masonry arches and timber trabeated openings, all contributing characteristics to the historic district.

The opposite side of 9th Street consists entirely of the Walter E. Washington Convention Center which spans between 7th and 9th Streets from Mount Vernon Square to N Street. As a series of diminishing volumes, the Convention Center stands about 45 feet tall at this end.

Proposal

The tripartite front façade would be dressed in buff brick and backdropped by a setback central bay and top floor of glass and aluminum. The commercial ground floor would be articulated as a base to the building by way of large areas of glazing subdivided into shop windows and transom windows by a steel canopy that would extend across the entire face of the building and wrap onto the alley side. Above the ground floor, two floors of residences would be fenestrated by ganged windows in deep reveal. The glass and aluminum fourth floor is set back from the front and south elevations about 4 feet.

The materials and rhythm of openings and stringcourses of the front façade would wrap around the corner onto the east-west alley and complete the front block of the building. Continuing along the alley, a garage entrance would be provided along with a three story gallery of glass with steel balconies (similar to those called for at 917 M Street, HPA #12-503). The ground floor and rear block would be masonry. Fenestration is ganged and paired in trabeated openings. At the rear property line along Blagden alley, a 10 foot tall brick garden wall encloses two private

patios and the building's rear egress. Large louvered or screened opening pierce the wall and approximate the rhythm and dimension of historic garage opening along this part of the alley.

On top of the fourth floor a series of private penthouse structures and decks, all connected by a trellis, is called for in plan (A-31, A-32) but is absent or only faintly rendered in the elevations. The building section on A-34 shows that the front setback will be 1:1. With a right-of-way width of 85 feet, the building height and penthouse setback would be visible from the front and several oblique directions.

Evaluation

The general concept—height, mass, materials, rhythm, proportion—are all consistent with the character of 9th Street and the historic district. The design benefits from a site context of minimal constraints. Historic neighbors have enough variation in building widths and heights and ground floor features like projecting bays and steps, that the concept's traditionally ordered tripartite arrangement relates well to its neighbors.

The building successfully bridges the primary context of 9th Street and the secondary context of the rear alleyscape. By virtue of material, fenestration and height of the garden wall, the new construction fits with garages and carriage houses integral to the historic alley character of the district.

The primary issue that cannot be evaluated sufficiently is that of the penthouse structures. While it is certain from basic calculations that they will be visible to some extent from several directions, the lack of sight line drawings and perspective renderings from enough angles makes it difficult to conclude if the penthouses would be *substantially* visible and how that might impact the historic district.¹

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board:

- *find the concept compatible with the historic district and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act,*
- *with the exception of the penthouses and direct the applicant to develop clear and comprehensive drawings exhibiting their visibility from the east, south and north, and return to the Board for further consideration.*
- *reiterate that no part of this recommendation shall be construed as a recommendation for approval or disapproval for any necessary zoning relief or interpretation.*

¹ Several pages of the concept drawings are contradictory as to the height of the north neighbor. Figure 1 of this staff report, A-25, the west elevation on A-25.1, and A-42 correctly show a two-story historic rowhouse. Other pages incorrectly show the north neighbor as a three-story building roughly equal in height to the proposed building (the north elevation on A-25.1, and A-26.1). The three story building is 1218 9th Street NW but is not adjacent to the site.



Figure 1. 1216, 1218, 1226, 1228, and 1230 9th Street NW, December 2011.